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AUTHOR Beeler, Kent D.
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ABSTRACT

A descriptive analysis is provided of institutional activity and characteristics of 20 four-year institutions tnat converted to a two-year status during the last 25 years. Institutions included in this study were identified from the annual issues, 1948-49 through 1972-73, of the "Educational Directory, Part 3." The information is profiled as to the following characteristics: (1) institutional control, (2) student body, (3) enrollment category, (4) academic calendar, and (5) regional accreditation. Following a review of pertinent literature, survey data related to these five points are discussed and tabulated. It was found that: (1) as to type of control, slightly over 50% (11 of the 20) of the transformed institutions were operated under church-related auspices, two were public and seven were under independent sponsorship; (2) as to type of student body, 3 out of 4 institutions involved in a downward shift had a coeducational student body enrolled on their campus; (3) data related to enrollment category show that 13 of the institutions had fewer than 300 students and four out of five has less than 500 enrolled; (4) in relation to academic calendar, 13 of 18 institutions that reported such data operated on the semester calendar system at the time of their academic transformation; and (5) using the boundaries of the six regional accrediting associations, the geographic distribution of the affected institutions revealed that the North Central and Northwest accrediting areas were most involved. The overall results show that less than one institution (0.8) annually sought an academic shortening during the period of the survey. (DB)

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Kent D. Beeler, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Eastern Michigan University

North Central SIG / Community-
Junior College Research
University of Michigan
July 13, 1973

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Conversion Patterns of Four-Year Institutions to Two-Year Institutions: 1948-1973

Introduction

> "Perhaps nowhere in American society has free enterprise, with the liberty and initiative it allows, been more widely adopted than in higher education. The institutions of higher education operate in a competitive market, both economically and intellectually, the assumption being that the best educational ideas and methods will come to the fore and gain public support."

Hardy[1] was quite accurate in his 1951 observation and more than two decades later it is no less true. Variations of this theme are depicted currently on the higher education scene. The creation of upper-division institutions offering only junior-senior and sometimes graduate level study and a decline in the number of single-sex institutions (with many becoming coeducational or coordinate units of other colleges and universities) serve as examples.

Changes in academic sponsorship include shifts of former church-related and independent institutions, both two- and four-year, into state supported public institutions. A variation in academic format can be found in the transformation of two-year institutions into four-year colleges and the reverse pattern with four-year institutions changing to two-year college status. It is the latter transformation that is the focus of this investigation.

This report, then, will consist of a descriptive analysis of institutional activity and characteristics of 20 four-year institutions that converted to a two-year status during the last 25 years.

Institutional information will be profiled on the basis of these characteristics: (1) institutional control, (2) student body, (3) enrollment category, (4) academic calendar and, (5) regional accreditation.

The 1948-49 academic year was a logical starting point for this survey for two reasons: first, it was the initial year that the United States Office of Education (USOE) prepared the Education Directory, "Part 3" Higher Education and, secondly, 1948-1973 provided a span of 25 years that could be encompassed by such an investigation.

Procedures of the Study

Institutions included in this study were identified from the annual issues, 1948-49 through 1972-73, of the Education Directory, Higher Education (designated as "Part 3" until 1968-69) prepared by the USOE. The directory section listing "institutions reclassified" was reviewed and then a roster was made of the transformed four-year institutions. The Education Directory for the year 1968-69 did not contain an "institutions reclassified" section but data was supplied from correspondence with the National Center for Educational Statistics of the USOE. Profile information on the involved four-year colleges was obtained from the previous year's directory (1972-73 data from the 1971-72 directory) since the current directory contained profile information on the affected institutions as newly designated two-year colleges. Institutional information was collected on institutional control, student body, enrollment category, academic calendar and, regional accreditation. Four-year institutions that may have merged with existing two-year colleges were not included here and the rate of incidence of that type of institutional change is not known.

One institution had actually undergone a downward transformation on two separate occasions. During the three-year period of 1969-70 and 1971-72, the institution declared it had reverted to a four-year status. For purposes of this report the institution was labeled as having completed a downward transfer on two occasions.

Curricular changes involved in the transitions would have been a valuable area to include. Unfortunately, the comparison of curricular transformations was not possible since the categories used by the USOE to designate the highest level of training offered by an institution was changed from eleven to five in 1968-69. In all probability we can assume, in the reversal of academic curriculums of surveyed institutions, that by far the largest majority initially provided the traditional college transfer or parallel program so commonplace at two-year colleges. This is likely since such a curriculum would closely parallel the previous lower division offerings of the affected institutions. A sprinkling of vocational-technical courses and perhaps a few adult and continuing education classes might also have been found.

Calendar information--whether the institution operated on a semester, trimester, or quarter academic plan--was not included in the annual USOE directory until the 1957-58 edition. Therefore, the institutional count on this characteristic was 18 not 20 since the data on two institutions affected in 1956-57 was not available.

The USOE directory did not report if institutions were eligible for provisional accreditation until the 1956-57 issue. That year was the first time, coincidentally, that an institution was reported during the survey period as having been involved in a downward transformation. All institutions provisionally accredited by the USOE were categorized

here as being regionally accredited.

No report is included on the institutional survival rate of the former four-year institutions since their reformation to a two-year college status. That is, did they eventually merge with other institutions, revert to another academic status, or close their doors altogether? It is important to note that no attempt was made to identify or analyze from the data presented any explanations underlying the changes in academic status of the profiled institutions. Some discussion, however, is made on the topic of downward institutional transformation later in the paper.

Review of the Literature

The professional literature in higher education is noticeably void regarding the process of institutional reversals, particularly in the activity of four-year to two-year changes in status. Several surveys have been conducted on the process of academic elongation, that is, institutions elevating their curriculums from two- to four-year levels. Bells and Martorana,[2,3] Schultz and Stickler,[4] and Beeler[5,6] have all provided a substantial review, covering various spans of time, of such institutional activity.

There is some related literature dealing with the student body involved in a recent phenomenon in higher education: reverse articulation, that is, students transferring from four-year colleges to junior colleges. A study by Meadows and Ingle[7] indicated the success experience of students with poor academic records at four-year colleges who had transferred to two-year colleges. A study by the Illinois Council on Articulation[8] concluded that junior colleges in that state in 1969 received as many transfers as they sent with the number of four-

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year transfer students only slightly smaller than the number of students transferring to four-year institutions state-wide.

Two recent studies were completed by Kuznik [9,10] dealing with reverse transfers. The first dealt with former four-year students during the 1970-71 year who had transferred to four Iowa community colleges. The later study dealt with reverse transfers from the University of Iowa to two-year institutions in that state. These studies, of course, involved students not institutions that have converted from a four- to a two-year status which is the focus here.

The history of American higher education between the Civil War and World War I was an era of great expansion and changing institutional goals and thus academic formats. Essentially, historians of that period agree that it provided for the flowering of the university movement. President William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, at the turn of the century, expected three of four existing colleges to be reduced to the status of academies or modified into junior colleges if they chose to adhere to the old collegiate ideals.[11] David Starr Jordan of Stanford declared in 1903 that "as time goes on the college will disappear, in fact, if not in name. The best will become universities, the others will return to their place as academies."[12] The passage of time, of course, has proved that these observations on the four-year colleges were only remotely accurate.

Reynolds[13] discussed four patterns in the origin of the junior college in the United States. Included in that list was the shift of many church-related colleges from four- to two-year institutions. The period following the end of the Civil War marked the rise of a large number of new four-year colleges created predominately by the many

Protestant denominations. Many of those colleges soon encountered serious financial problems. In some instances the problem was solved through the simple act of changing the four-year colleges into two-year colleges. Although this practice was fairly widespread in the states east of the Rocky Mountains, the largest number of such revised institutions were found in the southern and southeastern part of the United States.

Landrith[14] has provided a historical accounting of a number of private and public colleges that were reorganized as junior colleges during the first quarter of this century. Cited were several examples including a private senior college converting to a private junior college. Young L. G. Harris College (Georgia) was chartered as a four-year college in 1888. It ceased giving degrees and became a junior college in 1912. State supported senior colleges also were reorganized as junior colleges. Alabama State Agricultural and Mechanical Institute was organized in 1875 as the Huntsville Normal and Industrial School and became the State Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes in 1890. In 1921 it was reorganized as a junior college. Also identified was the pattern of private senior colleges changing to public junior colleges. Organized as John Tarleton College in 1899 the institution was accepted by the State of Texas in 1917 as a branch of Texas Agricultural College and it became a four-year junior college (grades 10-13).

The USOE statistics on transitions between types of institutions for the period 1956-57 through 1965-66 revealed ten cases of four- to two-year academic reversals including both public and privately supported institutions. Two additional institutions granting master's

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degrees and/or second professional degrees reverted to a two-year college status during the same ten year span.[15]

Tenney[16] has suggested a viable alternative to medicate the present uncomfortable state of collegiate health held by many small independent liberal arts colleges. He recommended that they consider the difficult but potentially valuable move from four-year to a two-year status.

Characteristics of Four-Year Colleges Converting to Two-Year Status

Table 1 deals with the classification, by academic year and location by state, of the involved 20 two-year colleges. In only 10 of the 25 years canvassed was there any institutional reclassification of a four-year colleges to a two-year status. No such institutional decapitation took place during the first eight years (1948-1956). Beginning with 1956-57 at least one downward shift was identified in each of the next four years. However, no activity was again present for the period of 1960-61 through 1967-68 except for one instance in 1963-64. Institutional activity has been constant in each of the last five years of the survey. While some cycles of institutional shifts can be deciphered, it is doubtful that a meaningful explanation can be provided since the annual range of downward transfers was so low. A low of one (in five different years) to a high of only four (1968-69 and 1971-72) was found. Eleven of the 20 transfers occurred in the last five years of the survey.

No state contributed more than one transfer institution in a single year. The highest number of transformations to occur in any state during the period surveyed was two (California, Massachusetts,

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Missouri, Texas and Virginia). The highest number of states involved in a single year was four (1968-69 and 1971-72). For the 25 year span, then, the survey revealed that an average of less than one (.8) four-year colleges annually sought academic shortening to a two-year level of operation.

Table 2 provides data on the former four-year institutions based the characteristics of: (1) type of control, (2) type of student body, (3) enrollment category, (4) academic calendar and, (5) regional accreditation for the years in which downward institutional activity occurred.

(1) Type of control. Slightly over 50 percent (11 of 20) of the transformed institutions were operated under church-related auspices. The number of affected institutions that were under public and independent sponsorship was two and seven respectively. No publically supported institution has been affected since 1968-69 and, interestingly, no independently sponsored four-year college was involved before 1963-64 but at least one has appeared annually since. The one proprietary college identified as having changed to a two-year status was categorized as an independent sponsored institution. Only in 1968-69 did all three types of institutions contribute at least one to the annual total.

(2) Type of student body. Exactly three out of four institutions involved in a downward shift had a coeducational student body enrolled on their campus. A coeducational former four-year college was involved every year except for 1970-71. Only two all-male campuses and three all-female campuses were involved in the total. The proportion of single-sex institutions involved is a higher proportion than that found for such campuses in the overall structure of higher education.

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(3) Enrollment category. Thirteen of the total institutions that participated in an academic shift had fewer than 300 students on their campuses and four out of five had less than 500 enrolled. Only a single institution had an enrollment in excess of 1,000 students with no institution represented in the 800-to over 1,000 range.

(4) Academic calendar. Thirteen of the 18 institutions that reported such data operated on the semester calendar system at the time of their academic transformation. No former four-year colleges were on the trimester system; five institutions had a quarter calendar format in operation at the time of their change in status.

(5) Regional accreditation. The geographic distribution of the affected institutions, using the boundaries of the six regional accrediting associations, revealed that the North Central and Northwest accrediting areas were most involved. In fact, only two other regional associations were represented (Southern and New England) leaving the Middle States and Western units without a single incidence within their region. Three-fifths of the surveyed institutions were without regional accreditation and were involved annually with the exception of two years (1969-70 and 1972-73).

Modal Institution

The modal former four-year college would have begun operating as a two-year institution beginning with the 1969-70 or 1972-73 year. The hypothetical institution would have been under church control and would not have been regionally accredited. The transformed college would have had an equal chance of being located in one of five states and on its campus would have been between 100-299 men and women attending classes on the semester academic calendar system.

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Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this survey was to provide data on the annual number and location of four-year institutions that became two-year colleges during the 25 year period of 1948-49 through 1972-73. Other descriptive institutional data reported included a breakdown of the 20 affected institutions by type of control, type of student body, enrollment category, academic calendar, and regional accreditation. This information was reported from the annual issues of the USOE Education Directory, Higher Education. A lack of professional writings related to the topic of academic delimitation to a two-year college level was pointed out in the literature review. No attempt was made to determine or analyze, from the data, factors that contributed to the downward extension of those institutions.

Less than one institution (.8) annually sought an academic shortening during the period of the survey; no more than four institutions in a given year sought such a status. Eleven of the 20 revised colleges had undergone their transformation in the last five-year period (1968-69 through 1972-73), but no trend was represented since eight other cases occurred in the four-year period of 1956-57 through 1959-60.

In conclusion, then, it would be erroroneous to state that four-year colleges, for whatever reasons or purposes, have displayed a pattern of willingness to reconstitute themselves as two-year colleges. It can be said that those institutions that did undergo a downward shift in academic program were more likely to have been under church-related auspices, enrolled between 100-299 men and women on a coeducational campus, operated on the semester calendar system, and were not regionally accredited.

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Discussion

In 1971 the prestigeous Carnegie Commission on Higher Education issued New Depression in Higher Education: A Study of Financial Conditions at 41 Colleges and Universities in which it was predicted that two-thirds of all institutions of higherlearning in this country were already in financial difficulty or were headed in that direction.

In the spring of 1973, Earl F. Cheit conducted a detailed follow-up of his earlier data on which that projection was based. Cheit found that the majority of the closely studied institutions had managed to escape or avoid serious financial troubles in the previous two years by increasing their use of cost-control measures to an "extraordinary degree." He continued, however, that these results, on balance, were by no means optimistic and that the future of such institutions would be shaped increasingly by events "outside the campus and beyond its control."[17]

In a follow-up of a study conducted during the summer of 1970 for the Association of American Colleges (composed of nearly 900 members with well over half being small, four-year, non-public regionally accredited institutions), William W. Jellema reported that more than 100 private colleges and universities had exhausted their liquid assets and were hovering on the brink of financial disaster. He reported that, assuming that the colleges continued their present level of operation, and that their deficits continued to be the same, a total of 254 surveyed institutions would be eligible for bankruptcy within 10 years or by 1981. By extrapolation, then, 365 of the 762 member colleges would fall into that category based on comparable returns from 507 colleges.[18]

A January, 1972 report from the Association of American Colleges reflected that the annual growth rate of undergraduate enrollments at

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private institutions has been steadily shrinking--from 3.6 per cent between 1965-66 to 0.5 per cent between 1969-70 and 1970-71--at the same time the growth rate in the public sector has been rising. The Carnegie Commission indicated in a report that the growth rate declined even further (0.2 per cent) for the 1971-72 year. Individual states, or regions may defy those averages, but there is little doubt that private enrollments are deteriorating on a national level.[19] The proportion of private two-year college enrollments, to the overall total, has also dropped sharply in the last several years and is about 5 to 7 per cent. However, the actual number of students in private two-year institutions has more than doubled in the last 15 years.[20]

It is proposed here that a considerable number of small struggling non-public four-year institutions, regionally accredited or non-accredited, might salvage themselves from a potential doom by redesigning their academic format to that of a two-year college. Many of the operating cost advantages of a downward shift are quite obvious but the extent of the differences may not be. At the University of Michigan, for example, a unit of study costs $1.73 at the upper-division level and $1.00 in the freshman-sophomore years. Private colleges report similar cost figures.[21]

The lower cost of lower-division instruction should permit institutions to offer reduced tuition instead of setting rates over the average costs of a four-year curriculum. This would make such new two-year colleges more competitive in the recruitment of students. Hopefully, some of the savings from lower operational costs would be used to step-up available financial aid to compensate a larger portion of the student body.

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Currently many private junior colleges (of which there are about 240 split nearly evenly between independent and church-related control) provide sub-baccalaureate degree and non-degree instruction in a less crowded learning environment on a residential campus. This could be better developed as an attractive alternative to a certain clientele of high school graduates coming from urban settings where the large number of public-supported two-year colleges are located.

It would certainly serve well for state systems of higher education, in some instances, to consider contracting for educational services from private two-year colleges rather than build or expand campuses.

Duplication of educational programs should be avoided wherein it is feasible , and state reimbursement for educational services provided by non-public institutions is a reasonable approach. Contractual instruction is already the practice in a number of states for professional-graduate level studies.

A change from a four- to a two-year status obviously has some built-in problems. Perhaps paramount is the "prestige barrier." Key administrators, in many instances, will have to accept the full effects of Parkinson's Law in their operation. Decapitation of the upper-level studies will likely prompt the reassignment or release of some administrative personnel; it will be no less true for faculty. Instructors will have to give up their highly specialized junior-senior classes and shift to handling duplicate sections of introductory survey courses. In actuality, some faculty will no longer have courses to teach in the new curricula.

Alumni will want to retain their identity with the Alma Mater and might sense that their earned degrees will be tarnished or diluted.

Additionally, external financial support for the revamped college will be affected to the degree that constituencies like alumni, private citizens, foundations, and corporations accept the revised college format. Students may also voice opposition since the sudden disappearance of upper-division study will prompt many of them to relocate to a second campus. The large portion of private four-year colleges, potentially involved in a shift, are located in non-urban settings as are most private two-year colleges.

Savings in the conversion to a two-year operation might also result in a reduced need for certain student services and related personnel, a decrease in the number of higher echelon administrators, fewer faculty with advanced degrees that traditionally require a higher salary, and a decrease in the clerical and secretarial force.

Many of the small non-public four-year colleges actually function much like a two-year college now even though they may not realize it. A high attrition rate of upperclassmen and small enrollments at that level would be indices to check. The academic caliber of many entering students, at some of the private institutions, suggests that population is better suited in an associate degree or vocational-technical program. To be recognized also is the growing sentiment that not everyone needs a four-year college degree.

The viable option of converting to a two-year operation is not held out as a panacea for all financially troubled four-year private colleges. It is hoped, however, that some will give consideration to a potential shift. The "testing of the water" with appropriate college constitutencies would quickly give a barometic reading as to the level of support and feasibility for an institutional downward transfer.

Table 1: Academic downward shft of former four-year institutions by academic year and location by state, 195-57 through 1972-73

State	56-57	57-58	58-9	59-60	63-64	68-69	69-70	70-71	71-72	72-73	Totals
Arkansas	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
California	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Connecticut	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Florida	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Idaho	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Kansas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Louisiana	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Missouri	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
New Mexico	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
North Carolina	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Ohio	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Tennessee	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Texas	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Virginia	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Totals	2	2	3	1	1	4	1	1	4	1	20

Table 2: Characteristics of former four-year institutions by type of control, type of student body, enrollment category, academic calendar, and regional accreditation, 1956-57 through 1972-73

Characteristic	56-57	57-58	58-59	59-60	63-64	68-69	69-70	70-71	71-72	72-73	Totals
Type of Control											
public	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
independent	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	7
church-related	1	2	3	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	11
Type of Student Body											
men	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
women	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
coeducational	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	0	4	1	15
Enrollment Category											
under 100	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	6
100-299	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	7
300-499	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
500-699	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
700-799	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
over 1,000	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Academic Calendar											
semester	*	1	3	1	0	4	0	1	3	0	13
trimester	*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
quarter	*	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	5
Regional Accreditation											
Southern	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
North Central	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
New England	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Middle States	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northwest	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3
No regional accreditation	1	1	2	1	1	3	0	1	2	0	12

*Data not provided in USOE Education Directory for 1956-57

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